July 7, 2017
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Endangered Species Coordinator
Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries
Region 4 Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Lewis and Clark County Conservation District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Landowner
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward a fish screen on an irrigation diversion on the Blackfoot River. The project site is located 1.6 miles southwest of Lincoln, MT, approximately 80 miles East of Missoula in Lewis and Clark County.

Please submit any comments by August 6th to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Blackfoot River Fish Screen

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward the installment of a fish screen and headgate on an irrigation diversion. The overall goal is to eliminate fish entrainment, improve migration corridors for native migratory trout, and improve irrigation practices.

I. Location of Project:

This project will be conducted on the Blackfoot River, located southwest of Lincoln, MT within Township 14N, Range 9W, Section 26 in Lewis and Clark County (Figure 1).

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to "protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species." The Blackfoot River in western Montana supports populations of Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout, both of which are federally recognized as "Species of Concern" in Montana. The goal of this project is to prevent entrainment of all fish, but especially Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout, in an irrigation diversion. The location of this diversion lies within the migration corridor for the only population of fluvial Bull Trout in the upper Blackfoot River as well as between the wintering/summering and spawning habitats for Westslope Cutthroat Trout.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to install a fish screen and headgate on an irrigation diversion. Areas of the channel would be re-graded, the banks stabilized, and the channel restored. Channel restoration would include installation of artificial log jams, riffles, and a step pool. The overall goal is to eliminate fish entrainment, improve migration corridors for native migratory trout, and improve irrigation practices. The fish screen will be low-maintenance and operate between 2 and 12 cfs (sized for the irrigator's right.

It will be a horizontal flat plate screen, produced by Farmers Conservation Alliance (FCA). This project is expected to cost $174,154.20. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to $49,949.00 to complete the project.

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Landowner	$4,000.00	
Bring Back the Natives		$35,000.20
WestSlope Chapter of Trout Unlimited		$10,000.00
Montana Trout Unlimited		$5,000.00
World Trout Foundation		$4,000.00
US Forest Service	$15,700.00	
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited	$5,505.00	
USFWS Partners of Fish and Wildlife Service		$45,000.00
TOTAL: $124,205.20		

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: Blackfoot River Fish Screen
Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)
Description of Project: Installation of a fish screen and head gate on an irrigation diversion

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		X
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X

8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			X
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X

B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in Marshall Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. A 318 authorization will be obtained, if necessary, to meet short-term water quality standards.

4. Existing water right or reservation.

Although this project will affect an irrigation diversion, it will not impact any existing water rights or reservations since the fish screen and headgate will be appropriately sized for the landowner's water right.

7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats.

This project would stabilize the bank in the immediate reach of the diversion and restore part of

the stream channel. Areas of the channel would be regraded and riffles, a step pool, and artificial log jams installed. This would stabilize eroding banks as well as create healthy aquatic and terrestrial habitat.

8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species.

This project will benefit both Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout, which are federally recognized as Species of Concern in Montana and are Federally Sensitive. The impacts on this species due to this project are predicted to be positive, potentially increasing recruitment and survival.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

All age classes of salmonids that happen enter the irrigation diversion through the headgate would be screened and returned to the stream through a bypass pipe. This is expected to increase fish survival and abundance. The stream restoration will also improve channel habitat, enhancing migration corridors for Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout, as well as several other species of fish. Any change to abundance and survival is expected to be positive.

VI. Explanation of Impacts to the Human Environment

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of the project, and any potential concerns will be addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, either the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or no fish screen or headgate would be installed. Bull Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, and other fishes would continue becoming entrained in the irrigation diversion.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to eliminate fish entrainment, improve migration corridors for native migratory trout and improve irrigation practices through the installation of a screen and headgate on an irrigation diversion.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Lewis and Clark County Conservation District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Montana Department of Natural Resources
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: **www.fwp.mt.gov**.

5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 11:59 PM, August 6th 2017.

6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue, P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432, E-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov
Contributors: Kyrsten Wolterstorff, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited

FIGURE 1: project location